

## MSC 1003 – Music in Civilization Fall 2017

Prof. Smey

Session 20, Tuesday Nov 7

In this session we blew through the remaining pieces we need for our quiz list (not counting Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, which is covered in our online unit.)

### Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet* [1869]

This is another big, dramatic orchestral work that tells a story, this time about *Romeo and Juliet*. It is organized in a somewhat loose sonata form, and the different themes are supposed to represent different characters or ideas from the play.

I introduced the four main themes from the piece in little clips:

The *Friar Laurence* theme

The *fighting* theme (or as the book calls it, the *feud* theme).

*Love theme 1*

*Love theme 2*

Then I played through the development section, so that we could hear the “Friar Laurence” theme and the “fighting theme” duke it out.

This piece is discussed in detail on pp. 267-269 in the eighth edition, pp. 257-260 in the seventh.

### Piano “Character” Pieces

Now we turn to the intimate, small-scale world of piano music, which was often performed in people's homes. The typical piano works of this era are often called “character pieces.” They occasionally tell a story (like with Program Music) or in the very least are meant to represent some person or idea. Even if they don't have a specific subject they may still promise some “mood.”

### Robert Schumann's *Carnaval* [1834]

*Carnaval* is a collection of 22 short piano pieces. The overall theme is Carnival, the European holiday that is analogous to our *Mardi Gras*. It happens right before Lent and it is a time for everybody to dress up in costumes and have fun.

There are certain traditional “stock characters” that are popular costumes during this event, and Schumann creates pieces of music for them. In class we listened to “Pierrot” (the sad clown) and “Pantalon and Columbine” (who chase and harass each other.) In addition, Schumann mixed in portraits of his friends, as though they might all be together at Carnival, having fun. We listened to his portrait of the love of his life, Clara Schumann.

The parts of this piece we are learning for the quiz are “Eusebius” and “Florestan.” These are two pseudonyms that Schumann used when he was writing music criticism. (This was another line of work he had, publishing his own music magazine.) “Eusebius” was supposed to represent his gentle and sensitive side, while “Florestan” was his passionate and outspoken persona. One can certainly hear the difference between these two pieces of music which reflect these two emotional approaches to life.

Craig Wright’s discussion of *Carnaval* is on p. 269 in the seventh edition only. (Unfortunately in the eighth edition he talks about a different Schumann piece.)

### Chopin, Nocturne in E-flat Major, Op. 9 No. 2 [1832]

In addition to works that are explicitly about people and things, composers in the Romantic period invent many new kinds of short pieces which promise a certain mood or a certain approach to music. The *Nocturne* is supposed to be a “night piece” – something pretty and relaxing that you would listen to late at night.

This piece presents a very nice melody that repeats a few times, ornamented a little more elaborately with each pass. Craig Wright calls this a Theme and Variations, but I am not quite convinced that this is appropriate – certainly the Mozart Theme and Variations that we looked at were much more systematic in altering its material in dramatic ways (changing the key, the meter etc.) whereas here we just play the same tune a little bit “better” each time.

The one aspect of this work that I do want you to focus on is the *rubato* playing. *Rubato* means “robbed time,” and it refers to a certain way of playing in which the performer speeds up and slows down at different points. Meter here is intended to be somewhat “elastic” – you are expected to “push” and “pull” the beat as part of your interpretation.

Every performer is going to do this slightly differently, making their interpretation of the piece unique. However, if they simply played the music mechanically, without *rubato*, it would be wrong!

*Rubato* is also evident in our other Romantic piano works (especially the Schumann!) but I think it is most easy to focus on and follow here.

Craig Wright discusses this piece on pp. 279-281 in the eighth edition, 270-271 in the seventh.

Franz Liszt, Transcendental Etude No. 8, “Wild Jagd” (Wild Hunt) [1851]

Also, we turned to the music of Franz Liszt. Liszt was famous as a *virtuoso*, someone who plays their instrument as well as is humanly possible. (Indeed, the technique of a virtuoso often seems *superhuman*.) He composed music that could show off this amazing ability, which we would call *virtuosic*.

We watched a video of another living virtuoso pianist playing Liszt’s “Wild Jagd” (or “Wild Hunt.”) This features a lot of loud, fast flurries of notes and, most impressively, a lot of rapid “jumping around” on the piano keyboard. The chords often have a “bum, badum, badum” rhythm that sounds like a hunting call, hence the title.

(“Etude” means “study,” so this sort of piece usually focuses on one technique and tries to push it as far as it can go. Here I think the technique being explored is the chords that jump around. As you can see from watching the youtube video performance, these gestures require incredibly fast and accurate arm movements and get more and more extreme as the piece progresses.)

Liszt is discussed in eighth edition, pp. 281-283, but unfortunately our author changes out the piece for something that is pretty but perhaps less exciting. “Wild Jagd” is discussed specifically in the seventh edition on pp. 272-275.